



Down the Road

An Optimists view on the state of Auto Hobby in the Navy

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This one's for you!

As the publication's title is supposed to imply, *Down the Road* is intended to keep the Auto Skills Managers and their staff in the field up-to-date on current information and initiatives as well as things you can expect to see somewhere "Down the Road" from the Naval Personnel Command (NPC), Community Support Branch. Included as well will be information on training, field related articles and anything else that might be helpful or informative. I don't intend to patronize anyone by pretending to be the "expert on automobiles" but hopefully, through your feedback, I can seek out material that is timely in content, applicable to your programs and informative in nature. Again, feedback is the key. Let me know what is helpful...What you would like to see more of... Got ideas? Tricks of the trade you'd like to share with others? Programs you would like to spotlight or just lessons learned that you can help others avoid? How about sharing them with your peers? I am always looking for articles to spotlight within the publication. Send them in and we will use them in the newsletter and ensure that the author is credited.

Enough with the speech. I'll get off of my "soapbox" and let you read on.... Enjoy!

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Navy Auto Skills Meeting 2000

Dates have been announced for this year's Automotive Aftermarket Industry Week in Las Vegas. This years show will be held October 31–November 3 at the Sands Expo Center and Las Vegas Convention Center combining two huge shows into one of the industry's biggest aftermarket shows anywhere. In conjunction with the show, the PERS-659 will host it's annual meeting October 30, 2000 at

Circus, Circus. A training announcement will provide further details and will be sent out to all MWR Departments in August. We are also working with the other services Auto Skills programs to hold a joint service social and get managers from the different services together to swap ideas, share successes and talk

about issues affecting their field. Contrary to popular belief, the show in Vegas will not be all fun and games...There are over 100 educational seminars, workshops and demonstration clinics, over 4,000 exhibitors, 5,000+ new products. Blocks of rooms have been reserved with Circus, Circus which is in walking distance to the Expo Center. PUT THIS ONE ON YOUR CALENDER!!!!

Mitchell On-Demand Vs. AllData

I am not a big fan of salespeople. Buying a new car when I moved to Tennessee was an experience I'd rather not repeat. *Root canal work without anesthesia would be a preferable alternative.* Having said this, I recently sat through demonstrations of cd-rom service manual programs by both AllData and Mitchell On-Demand. NSA Mid-South's Auto Skills Shop Manager, Frank Zumwalt was kind enough to sit in with me during the proceedings so that I could get feedback from someone with expertise in the field. Having seen neither of these products in action before, I had no idea what to expect (and I think I've already made my point clear on where I stand with sales pitches). However, once we got past the "my product is the best" portion, I was really impressed with the power that these programs possess. Whether it is information on Technical Service Bulletins, wiring diagrams, quotes on repair costs, tutorials or just basic information on repairs, either of these programs would be a powerful asset to an Auto Skills program. With the advent of Digital Video Disc players (DVD), the days of switching between anywhere from 15–40 discs to find information on different cars are gone. For the same price as the regular cd-roms, you can upgrade your system (if you are currently using Mitchell or AllData) to DVD and use as few as one disc and never have to switch a disc again. This is, of course, assuming that your computer is set up for DVD. If it is, and you are operating one of these systems, it's worth a call to your sales representative. If you aren't currently one of the fortunate few using a DVD system, I would highly recommend that you consider adding it into the budget. Imagine having the ability to hand print information to customers and staff without having to dig through those bulky paper manuals. Imagine not having to replace those bulky manuals every year due to wear and tear. Imagine having current information on automobiles up to the year 2000. Well...You get the picture. The applications are endless.

So who was the winner? What we got out of the demo was this: each has advantages over the other in certain areas. However, both are completely suitable for use in an Auto Skills program. The small differences are just that...Small. Sooooo, we are calling it a draw. Stay tuned for a rematch...

AUTOMOTIVE SKILLS DIRECTORY 2000

The new directory should be on your desk as we speak. If not, you should be receiving it in the not-so-distant future. If you don't receive a copy by April 15, 2000, please give me a call and let me know. I will re-send copies as necessary. I hope you will find this a useful tool to network with other Auto Skills programs. That is it's primary purpose! To everyone that helped in making this possible, a sincere debt of gratitude is owed. Keep up the good work by sending in any personnel, address or phone number changes as they occur. The information should also be available soon through the web site.

"PETS ALLOWED?"

The PET initiative hits its stride with Auto Skills on the horizon...

Would you consider yourself a "pet lover"? An advocate for pet's rights? Well that is exactly what is happening at PERS-65. The PET I am referring to here is not of the furry, four-legged variety but rather an acronym for an initiative taking place within Navy MWR.

Program Enhancement Teams (PET) consist of program managers from Pers-65 and field personnel. 14 program areas have been identified, including the **Auto Skills program**, and team members have been (or soon will be) identified for each. These teams are tasked with identifying core program and service standards. The ultimate goal of this initiative will be to create greater consistency between all Navy programs and facilities worldwide and improve product and service performance to ensure customer loyalty

and satisfaction. Some have already completed the initial phases of this process. I recently had the opportunity to sit in with the Information, Ticket & Tours (ITT) PET and saw the process in action. It was powerful to see managers working in unison towards identifying the standards to be addressed, and more powerful yet to see them setting up a means to accomplish them.

Teams will meet 2-3 times per year. This will be an ongoing evolution, and while it may not be possible to keep the same team members over an extended period of time, the intent is to continuously update the original standards developed by utilizing the PET process. Here is what we hope to accomplish:

- Benchmark the program's service processes.
- Address customer service survey satisfaction data and areas of current dissatisfaction (e.g., Facility, Personnel, Equipment, Patron Usage).
- Define common program standards to ensure quality, accessibility, and equity service throughout the MWR program worldwide.
- Ensure consistent pricing philosophy and marketing strategies given competitive pressures, constraints on MWR and Sailors' budgets and the patrons' view of the value received.
- Evaluate policies and practices for customer-friendliness and flexibility.

The program standards that will be addressed are:

- Facility
- Personnel
- Equipment
- APF Funding/Financial Viability
- Customer Service
- Customer Feedback
- Program Elements
- Patron Usage

How does all this apply to the Auto Skills program? The initial Auto Skills PET meeting is tentatively scheduled to happen in October of this year. It will be tied in to our annual meeting in Las Vegas. The PET will meet prior to the Navy meeting and will brief attendees the next day at the meeting. PET members are selected based upon their geographical location, knowledge, passion and commitment to improving Navy Auto Skills programs. This is an excellent opportunity for the Auto Skills program to address many of the issues that were first brought to light at last year's Auto Skills meeting. If you would like more information on this process, give me a call at (901) 874-4962 or DSN 882-4962.

Marketing- A Lost Art?

"I know this business inside out...I just don't have the foggiest idea of how to market it!" Ever felt this way? Most of us at some point have beat our heads against the wall wondering what we have to do to get customers in the door. You have a good product, you are trying all the conventional means of advertising the product, your existing customer base is happy with your product and services, yet you have trouble getting the "non-traditional" customer in your door.

Maybe the problem is not in the level of effort put forth but rather in the quality of the effort. Think in terms of the customer...What are the benefits that the customer receives from using your service? How does your product or service improve your customer's life? Have you talked to your customer lately and solicited their opinion? Does your product or service save them time? Save them money? Make them more attractive? Your marketing should drive home the most important benefits as clearly and directly as possible. When you advertise the features of your product or service, connect those features to the benefits they will bring the customer.

Demonstrate the Benefits

How can this be done in the Auto Skills program? It's obvious to any do-it-yourselfer that he or she saves money every time they work on their car. But how about the aforementioned "non-traditional customer" who has never used the shop? How do you convey the benefits of learning to work on a car yourself to them? *Attracting this "non-traditional" customer may take a "non-traditional" marketing approach. Take for instance the following:*

Some of the most common automotive repairs on vehicles utilizing Auto Hobby operations include:

- Oil Changes
- Tune—ups
- Brake work

How about marketing these services by illustrating to the customer the benefit of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) vs. paying a commercial garage. What if it was broken down into \$\$ saved? What if we could show that the average car owner spends approximately \$XXX.XX in automotive repair and general maintenance at the local garage versus spending just \$XXX.XX (parts only). What if we then illustrated how easy it is to learn these skills whether you've been around cars all your life or are just seeing one for the first time. This is an example of one possible benefit. Can you think of others? The possibilities are endless.

Does this sound a little unrealistic? Maybe it is if we stay within our comfortable frame of reference. Personally, I think it is only unrealistic if we limit our thought processes and are resistant to change. A recent survey conducted by the Car Care Council showed that 73% of the women surveyed were interested in information concerning automotive maintenance and repair. Could this be one of the "non-traditional" customers mentioned above? I'll let you be the judge.

Work With Your Marketing Department.

Each MWR Department should have a Marketing Director or someone responsible for marketing MWR's programs. Use this person to bounce off ideas. Use his or her department to develop professional looking flyers and other material. Have them do the work—they are the experts! And don't be afraid to be passionate and fight for your program. Marketing departments are often times inundated with requests and sometimes have to prioritize. If you show them you are willing to work with them, they usually reciprocate. Good-Luck!

LINKS

The following list of web links may be useful to Auto Skills Staff. It will be updated each issue. If you have a site you think might be useful to include, feel free to give me a call... *(A word of thanks to the Army Auto Skills program which provided many of the sites listed).*

<http://www.atn.com/auto>
by

A question and answer site
international auto tech net.

<http://www.aftmkt.com>

A directory of aftermarket
suppliers

<http://www.gsa.gov/regions/7fss/7fx/schedules/sch49ib/html>
of
are on
schedule.

A comprehensive schedule
automotive vendors that
the GSA federal supply

<http://www.ccar-greenlink.org>
environmental
compliance. *(A great
resource!)*

EPA's office for
automobile

<http://www.theautochannel.com>
indus-
information and
parts and

A variety of information on
try news, repair
articles, tools and
more!

<http://www.autodigest.com>
manuals,

Industry news, auto
books and other

resources for

<http://www.sts.sae.org>
Society:
train-

<http://www.babcox.com>

"Tech-
fo-
information on numerous topics.

<http://www.alldata.com>
manual
sup-

<http://www.mitchell.com>
manual
sup-

<http://www.asacert.org>
Automotive

sale.

Service Technicians
Technical information and
ing, books manuals and re-
sources.

Automotive aftermarket
information including
Talk" and other interactive
rums. A wide variety of

Computerized service
program with online tech
port.

Computerized service
program with online tech
port.

National Institute for

Service Excellence.

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Send any comments, questions or submissions to:

Mark Richards, Pers-659
Naval Personnel Command—MWR Division
5720 Integrity Drive
Millington, Tennessee 38055-6590

Phone, Fax or Email:

Commercial	(901) 874-4962 (Phone)
DSN	882-4962 (phone)
Commercial	(901) 874-6823 (fax)
DSN	882-6823 (fax)